

To Edward Harley Esq

PLAIN NOTIONS

OF OUR

LORD'S DIVINITY.

Set forth in a

SERMON

PREACHED upon

CHRISTMAS-DAY,

AT THE

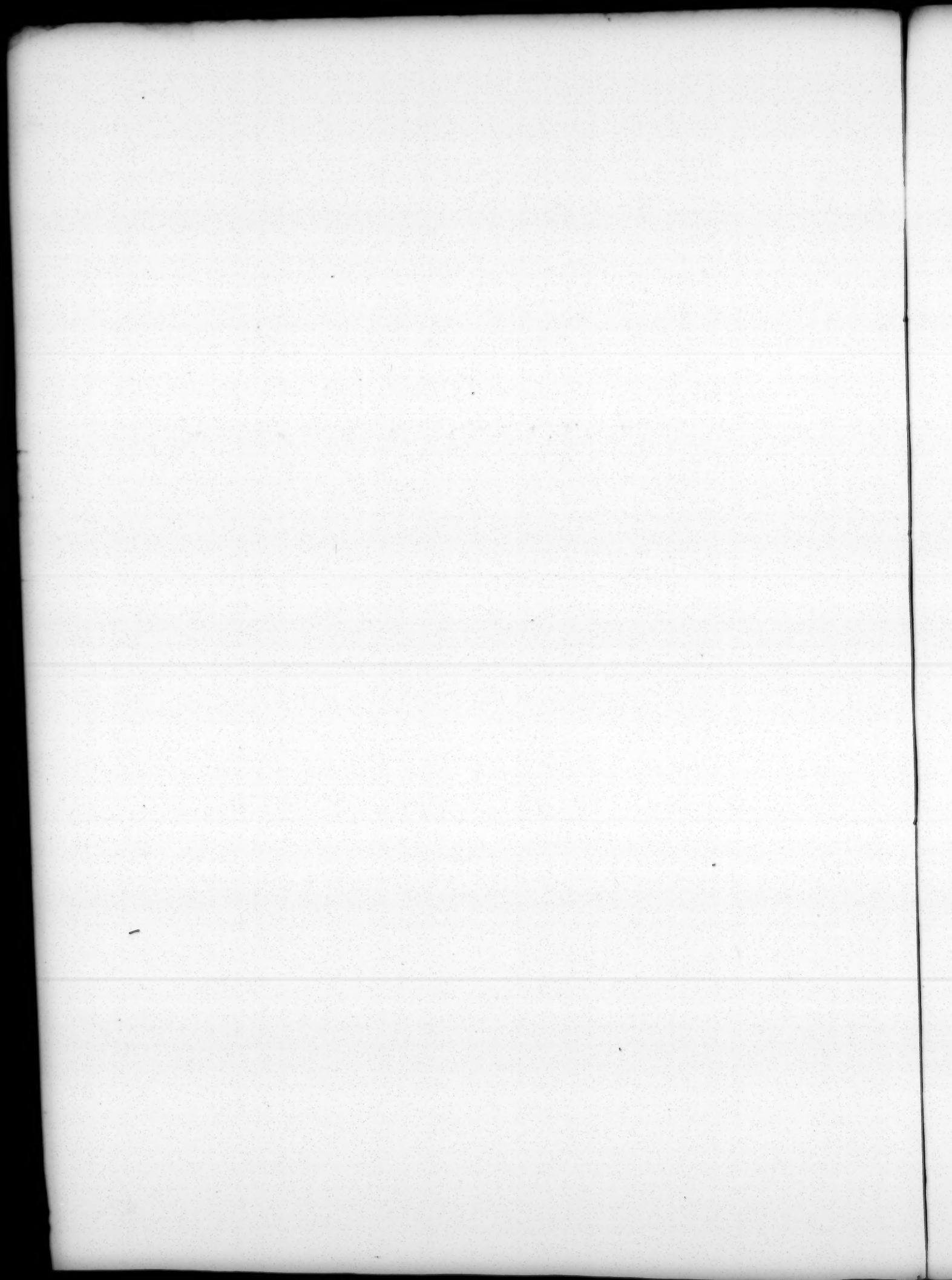
Royal Chapel of *Whitehall*.

*Publish'd at the Request of many of the
Audience.*

By THOMAS MANGER, LL.D.
Chaplain to the Right Reverend Father in
God, JOHN, Lord Bishop of *London*.

L O N D O N:

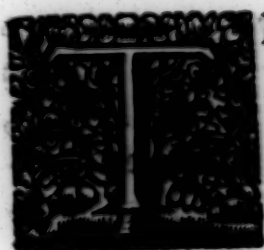
Printed for W. and J. INNVYS, at the Prince's
Arms at the *West End* of *St. Paul's Church-*
yard. MDCCXIX.





MATTH. i. 23.

They shall call his Name Emmanuel; which being interpreted, is, God with us.



THESE Words significantly express the divine Character of our Lord, and do therefore offer a suitable Subject of Meditation at this solemn Festival. Nothing can be so proper to entertain your Thoughts, and enflame your Affections, as the Dignity of that Saviour and Master whose Birth you do now commemorate. Your Zeal, your Love, and your Joy, will ever rise in proportion to your high or humble Opinion of him; nor can I therefore offer any better Motives for them, than this fundamental Article of your Christian Faith.

A 2

They

Plain Notions of

They will be the most likely to act up to their Duty at this time, who at all others believe, that *this Word that was made Flesh and dwelt amongst us was in the Beginning with God, and was God*; and his Birth in time by a Virgin, will be more thankfully remembered, by those who believe that *his goings out were from everlasting*. How important shall we think that Errand, upon which so divine a Messenger vouchsafed to come; how effectual and extensive that Dispensation of Mercy, that requir'd the Prince of Peace to preach and transact it in his own Person; how astonishing shall we reckon the Condescension of our Lord, in putting on our Flesh; when by that he divested *himself of that Glory which he had before the World was*: when for our sakes the Sovereign became a Servant, and the Creator of all things as one of his Creatures; when he, in whom *dwelt the Fulness of the Godhead bodily*, stoop'd to the Condition of Mortals, and debas'd himself, and exalted us by his Incarnation? In short, with what pious Transports should we reflect upon that transcendent Mystery of Godliness, whereby we are taught, that *God was manifested in the Flesh*?

They who are truly persuaded, that the Son of God, for whose merciful Visit we have been solemnly giving Thanks, was *the Brightness of his Father's Glory, and the express Image of his Person*, will want nothing besides to convince

our Lord's Divinity. 5

convince them of the Blessing of his Coming, and of their own Obligations for it. But on the other side, an injurious Belief, or lessening of our Lord, can produce nothing but Coldness and Unthankfulness upon this Occasion: and it hath therefore generally so happen'd, nor indeed can it happen otherwise, that they who are dispos'd to undervalue the great Author of our Faith, have been very insensible of the Wisdom and Mercy of his Incarnation.

In order therefore to employ your Meditations suitably to this great Christian Anniversary, I shall,

I. Explain the Doctrine express'd under the Name *Emmanuel*.

II. Shew the Truth of it, from the particular Behaviour of our Lord whilst on Earth.

I. I am to explain the Doctrine imply'd under the Word *Emmanuel*.

This Name, which is here bestow'd upon our Lord, will appear upon a strict Inquiry to import no less than the Manifestation and the Belief of his Divinity. The Evangelist himself hath explain'd the Sense of the Word *Emmanuel*, by interpreting it *God with us*; and both the Etymology of the Word, and the Behaviour of our Lord upon Earth, do justify the Truth and Propriety of the Interpretation.
The

6 *Plain Notions of*

The Text doth not mean, that our blessed Saviour should be actually call'd by that very Name, but that his appearance in the Flesh should be such, as to deserve that Character which was couch'd under the Name; that the Blessings of his coming should be so great, and his Person and Authority so divine, as to represent to all the Purposes of it, the immediate Presence of the Lord of Hosts; that all who were Witnesses of his Appearance, might with great truth and believing thankfulness say, *God is with us.*

It seems that the *Jews* formerly objected against the Accomplishment of this Prophecy, that *Jesus* was never call'd by this Name. But they are answer'd by *Tertullian* *, that they do herein follow the Sound more than the Sense; for that as many as are converted from Judaism to Christianity do, by acknowledging our Lord's Divinity, prove and confirm the Completion of this Prediction; if they were convinc'd from his Incarnation that *God was with them*, then this Appellation of *Emmanuel* was strictly and literally verify'd.

But this is farther evident from the sacred Style, whereby Names did more peculiarly express the Properties of things; they were accounted very significant, and prophetically expressive, of the Person's Station and Character to whom they belong'd, or as so many Omens

* Lib. contra Judæos.

our Lord's Divinity. 7

and Prefages of the Circumstances of that time in which they were to live. For this Reason, in many Passages of Scripture to be call'd by such a Name, signifies those Talents and Qualifications that are denoted by it.

Thus the several Names which are foretold of our Saviour by the Prophets, do denote the Character and Success he met with. If he was to *be call'd wonderful Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace*, this signifies that he truly was, what he was call'd, and would be deservedly acknowledg'd so. Thus he is foretold in *Jeremiah*, by the Name of *the Lord our Righteousness*, and in *Zachariah*, by that of *the Branch*; the former denoting, that Justification by the new Covenant was the Work of divine Power; the latter, the great Growth and Propagation of the Gospel.

The Name *Emmanuel* being apply'd to our Lord, must, according to the Style of Scripture, denote that divine Character of him, which all who profess to believe in him, must acknowledge. It reminds us, that he was *God manifested in the Flesh*; and in the strictest Propriety of the Word, *God with us*. This Appellation not only signifies the Presence of God by his ordinary Protection and Providence, but by the Incarnation of the eternal Son, who is so much *One with his Father*, so truly the *express Image of his Person*, that he who hath seen
the

the Son hath seen the Father also. This Sense of the Expression may be justify'd from the Circumstances of the *Jews*, to whom it was spoke; they being God's peculiar People, had the more immediate Tokens of his Presence among them; there was continually over the holy Tabernacle an appearance of Glory, in the Shape of a *Cloud by Day*, and a *Pillar of Fire by Night*. This they call'd the *Shechinah* or *Divine Presence*; and accounted the Continuance of it as a sure Pledge of God's Protection, as an ancient Author observes. But as this Appearance of Majesty was to cease with the first Temple, they had, to comfort them under the want of it, an Assurance, confirm'd by many Predictions, that *God would be with them, and dwell among them; the Lord whom ye seek, saith the Prophet Malachy, shall suddenly come into his Temple, even the Messenger of the Covenant whom ye delight in.* All which, and many other like Passages, tho' referr'd by the carnal *Jews* to the Restoration of that *Shechinah* or Divine Presence over the Temple, were accomplish'd, *when the Word was made Flesh and dwelt amongst us*; and during our Redeemer's Incarnation it was true to the Letter, that *the Tabernacle of God, as St. John expresseth it, was with Men.*

The ancient Prophecies give more Proofs of our Lord's Divinity than is generally thought; for it is observable, that the many magnificent
Expres-

our Lord's Divinity. 9

Expressions spoken in them, concerning the Greatness and Mercy of God, are only applicable to the Messiah, and the Redemption wrought for us by him. The *Jews*, probably before, most certainly after, the Incarnation, interpreted these Expressions in another way; they seem to have been in a great measure Strangers to the Doctrine I am explaining, and to have look'd for nothing in the Messiah's Person but what was human; nothing in the Deliverance to be wrought by him but what was temporal. Their first Disputes with the Christians, were not only whether *Jesus* was the Messiah, but whether the Messiah was to be more than Man; and therefore it hath been an unsuccessful, as well as useless Attempt, to prove this Article of the Christian Faith, from some obscure Passages of the ancient Rabbins.

The Divinity of our Lord was foretold under such Terms, which tho' evident to us now, yet were very dark at their first Revelation. Till *he* was declar'd *to be the* Son of God with Power, and Men's Hearts were soften'd and prepar'd by the Spirit of Truth, the World was incapable of understanding and receiving it. It seem'd necessary to let us into the Knowledge of the Holy Trinity by degrees; which if it had been expressly discover'd at first would have been hazardous, and have given too much Encouragement, by not being well understood, to *Polytheism* in the *Gentiles*, and

10 *Plain Notions of*

Idolatry in the *Jews*. So sublime a Truth would have been as distastful to their unprepar'd Understandings *, as too much Light is to weak Eyes: and therefore, though it was reveal'd in the *Old Testament*, yet it was not design'd to be receiv'd as a Matter of Faith, till the Conviction of our Lord's Miracles and Resurrection, and the Effusion of the Spirit, made way for it. Those Shadows which cover'd this Doctrine were suited to the Infancy of Religion, and were not to be taken away till the rising of the Son of Righteousness.

Our blessed Lord himself, in compliance probably with the Weakness and Prejudices of his Hearers, says very little in his Discourses of his own Divinity. This seem'd to be one of those things which *they were not as yet able to receive*. He constantly calls himself by no other Name than the Son of Man; nor doth it appear, that his Disciples, till after his Resurrection, St. *Peter* only excepted, took him for a divine Person. He who *knew what was in Man* avoided all Occasions of offending their weak Judgments, by telling them more than they were able to bear; and therefore, when from *calling God Father* he was by the jealous *Jews* accus'd of *making himself equal with*

* Διότι ὅτι κατ' ἀρχαί ἡ τριάς ἔχ' ἅμα κατ' ἐνέργειαν, ὅτι καθάπερ τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖσι τὸ λαμπρὸν φῶς, καὶ τοι σωτήριον ὃν αἰσθόν ἐπιβλαστέον, ἔτω καὶ τοῖς εἰς τὸ πολυθεὸν ἀποβρωθεῖον, ἡ τριαδικὴ θεολογία βλαστέον ὑπῆρχε καὶ ἐπιζήμιον. *Jobius apud Photium.*

our Lord's Divinity. I I

God, he gave such an Answer as was suitable to his Compassion for them, and his Regard to the Truth; he reply'd in such a manner, as neither to disown the thing, nor yet by saying too much of it to shock and offend them. He chose rather to set forth his Divinity by his authoritative Preaching and Miracles, than by formal express Declarations; and his doing more than ever Man did, extorted a Confession even from his Enemies, that he was truly the Son of God. But tho' *Jesus* himself was very cautious of making overt Declarations of this kind, his Apostles after his Ascension seem not to be so. The three former Evangelists do indeed say the least of this Doctrine, either because they thought the History of his Life and Actions the best Proof of it, or that it was sufficiently maintain'd in the Institution of Baptism. *St. Paul*, who wrote later, and saw some Heresies in their Infancy, is fuller and more express in his Assertions of our Lord's Divinity; but *St. John*, who liv'd late enough to be witness of the Violence and great Growth of the *Ebionites* and *Cerinthians*, who deny'd this Doctrine, seems to have wrote his Gospel in direct Opposition to them. He therefore more clearly than the rest affirms, that the *Word was God*; that all things were made by him, and *that these things were written that we might believe that Jesus is the Son of God.*

12 *Plain Notions of*

Thus much then may be inferr'd from the Whole, that the calling of our Lord by the Name of *Emmanuel*, doth signify the Manifestation of God in the Flesh; and is therefore an exprefs Assertion of the Divinity of him that was so call'd; that the *Jews* probably did not so explain this, and other Prophecies relating to the Messiah, as to believe him a divine Person; nor were they qualify'd to receive this Doctrine, till they were instructed by Christ, and enlightned by the Holy Spirit. And lastly, that our blessed Lord chose rather to set forth his divine Character by his Actions than his Discourses; and left the fuller Declarations of it to be made by his Apostles, after his Ascension. I shall therefore conclude this Head with a noted Passage of *Baruch*, *This is our God, and there shall none other be accounted of in comparifon of him. He hath found out all the way of Knowledge, and hath given it unto Jacob his Servant, and Israel his Beloved. Afterward did he shew himself upon Earth, and conversed with Men.*

I come now in the second Place, to shew the Truth of the Doctrine of the Text, thus explain'd, from our Saviour's Behaviour.

And the first Argument of this may be taken from the Style and Manner of his Preaching. St. *Matthew* observes, that our Saviour *taught as one having Authority, and not*

as

our Lord's Divinity. 13

as the Scribes. The Manner of his Instructions, which he utter'd rather as a Prince than an Ambassador, shews him to be *God manifested in the Flesh*. If he had come into the World with a delegated and inferior Commission, he would not have given the Terms of Salvation in his own Name. He could not, without being *One with his Father*, have assum'd so much of his Authority, as to declare these Rules of Obedience in the Gospel, as from himself.

The Prophets and Teachers who went before, deliver'd all their Instructions in the Name of God who sent them; nor did they assume any other Character, than that of being the Messengers and Interpreters of God's Will. They introduc'd their Admonitions with, *thus saith the Lord*; but our Lord with that Authority which became the Son of God, taught his Disciples in another Style, and therefore speaks in his own Name: *Ye have heard, saith he, what hath been said by them of old time; but I say unto you.* This likewise is the more remarkable, that he herein opposeth his own Injunctions to those of *Moses*; and exceeds the usual Commission of a Prophet, in altering and amending the old Law, which had been given by divine Appointment.

It is very evident, and is withal an undoubted Argument of our Lord's Divinity, that in his Sermon upon the Mount, he did not only
rescue

14 *Plain Notions of*

rescue the Law from the false and narrow Interpretations of Doctors, but actually added to the Matter of it, by requiring some more perfect Rules of Obedience than had been enacted before. But he not only improv'd the Obligations of the moral Precepts, but set aside, which requir'd still a higher Commission, those of the Ceremonial. No less Person than such as we believe the Christian Law-giver to be, could have set aside those Precepts, which it was made criminal by divine Revelation, to *add to or diminish*. For what other Authority than that which enacted the Law could repeal it; and how evidently therefore must he be *God with us*, who could alter a divine Institution; and by making a new Covenant cancel the old one, which had been proclaim'd in all the Pomp of Majesty, and even by the Voice of God himself?

The going of our Saviour into the Mountain to teach his Disciples, hath been observ'd by the Ancients to be an Imitation of the Delivery of the Law from Mount *Sina*; and the Manner in which he there deliver'd his Sermon, being different from all Prophets and Teachers before, shews that he taught his Gospel with equal Authority. Conformably to this authoritative way of Speaking, he calls the Gospel *my Doctrine*, *my Words*, and *my Sayings*; and the Apostles in like manner, call their Preaching the Doctrine of Christ; which Appellations could not be apply'd

our Lord's Divinity. 15

ply'd to any other than *God manifested in the Flesh*; and therefore are a certain Proof that he was so.

Another Proof which our Lord gave of his own Divinity, may be taken from the Promises which he made his Disciples.

His Promises do as evidently shew him to *be God with us*, as his Instructions. He takes upon him to promise in his own Name all the Blessings of the new Covenant; the Acceptance of our Prayers is obtain'd by his Intercession, and the Pardon of Sins by his Satisfaction. *Whatsoever you shall ask the Father in my Name, I will do it.* How truly then doth he, by assuring us of these his Merits in our behalf, assume a divine Character; how much doth he appear *One with his Father*, who could be successful for all that ask in his Name; for what created Being, whose Faculties, and the Exercise of them are the Gift of divine Mercy, could claim so much at the Throne of Grace, as to intercede for others; what Creature, how exalted soever in his Capacities or Performances, can discharge his own Obligations for them?

All created Beings are, in the Sight of him who made them, unprofitable and undeserving; and are so far from having the Title to intercede for others, that they cannot satisfy for themselves. Their Virtues encrease their Obligations, and the more Good they do, they are so much more indebted for the Power of doing

16 *Plain Notions of*

doing it: the more perfect they are in their Operations, the less qualify'd they are, if they consider from whence they deriv'd their Perfections, to be Mediators and Intercessors; they owe for their Merits the greater Debt to the divine Bounty; and the best and most perfect of Creatures, are the most oblig'd to Humility and Thankfulness.

Our Lord therefore by undertaking, that our Prayers and Endeavours are accepted in and through him, doth evidently declare the Truth of his Divinity. The Work of Salvation, which he ascribes to himself, shews him to be superior to all created Beings, how perfect and exalted soever; and we, by professing him to be our Saviour and Mediator, do at the same time acknowledge him our Lord and our God. This Argument hath been therefore us'd by the ancient Fathers, against those Hereticks which were Enemies to our Lord. And it is observ'd by * *Irenæus*, that the *Ebionites* will be particularly condemn'd; for how *can they be sav'd, if God upon Earth hath not wrought their Salvation.*

But if our Saviour takes upon him a divine Character, in assuring us of the Recommendation of our Prayers to his Father, how much more doth he so, when he promiseth the Success of them, as from himself. *If you*

* *Ἀναλαμβάνει ὁ καὶ τὰς Ἑβιωναίους. πῶς γὰρ δύναται σωθῆναι, εἰ μὴ ὁ Θεὸς ἢ ὁ σωτήριον αὐτῶν ἐπὶ γῆς ἐξασσάμενος.* lib. 4. c. 59.

shall

our Lord's Divinity. 17

shall ask any thing in my Name, saith he, I will do it. He doth manifestly shew his Union and Equality with the Father, in ascribing the same Actions in common to both. Thus tho' he tells his Disciples that he will *pray the Father, and he shall send them another Comforter*, yet he elsewhere promises to send them that Comforter himself. And for the same Reason that blessed Spirit is promiscuously call'd the *Spirit of God*, and the *Spirit of Christ*. If our Lord then be the Giver of that Holy Spirit, must he not be accounted that God who giveth Grace to the Humble? In like manner the Resurrection is not only call'd the Work of God through Christ, but the Work of Christ himself. *He that eateth my Flesh and drinketh my Blood, saith our Saviour, hath eternal Life, and I will raise him up at the last Day.*

But his Promise of being in the midst of his Followers, when *they are gathered together in his Name*, and of continuing *always with them unto the end of the World*, is still a more evident Proof of his divine Attributes. What can look more like Omnipresence, than to affirm, that wherever Prayers are made in his Name, there is he ready to hear and to accept them? How could he speak more resembling the Style of divine Majesty, than to promise his Disciples to be ever with them; to protect them by his Power, and assist them by his Grace, to the end of the World? The Pro-

18 *Plain Notions of*

mises then of the Holy Spirit, of Resurrection to Life eternal, and of Presence and Protection at all times, which are made by our Lord in his own Name, as well as his Fathers, are such as could be made by no subordinate created Being; and therefore shew him, who hath both made and perform'd them, to be truly and properly *God with us*.

Another Proof of our Lord's Divinity, may be taken from that Duty and Worship which he requir'd of his Followers.

Our Lord did in this Respect act up to the Dignity and Character of a divine Person. He accepted of that Homage from his Disciples, which could be paid justly and innocently to no other than the Sovereign of the World. All Worship of Creatures, and such was Christ if he was not *God manifested in the Flesh*, is inconsistent with our Duty to the Creator, and is expressly forbid by that Revelation which our Saviour came not to *destroy* but to *fulfill*. When St. John * worshipp'd the Angel, he was check'd by him, and told, *See thou do it not, for I am thy Fellow Servant, and of thy Brethren the Prophets— worship God*. Thus, beyond all doubt, would the meek and humble *Jesus* likewise have check'd the forward Respect of his Followers, if he had not desir'd to be thought by them *God with us*; he would have been cautious of per-

* Rev. 22. 9.

our Lord's Divinity. 19

mitting any Worship to be paid to him, which was not his due, and which rivall'd the Glory of the Almighty. But we read of no Examples of this kind in any of the Gospels; when his Followers and Disciples did, upon several Occasions, fall down and worship him, he was so far from charging them with Superstition and Idolatry, that he approv'd of their Worship.

But our Lord did not only permit and connive at the Homage and Respect of his Disciples, but in plain and express Terms demanded it. *You believe in God, saith he, believe also in me.* Now Belief signifies Trust and Confidence, which are certainly sinful, when plac'd in any other than the Deity. By bidding them believe in him equally with the Father, he doth implicitly tell them; "Ye
" have confidence in your heavenly Father's
" Goodness, have likewise so in me, through
" whom that Goodness is convey'd; apply
" to me at all times for my Protection, be-
" lieve me to be your Mediator and Inter-
" cessor; and in that believe me to be your
" Lord and your God". He doth therefore hereby require that Trust and Confidence in himself, which are not due to any less Person, than to him who *was One with the Father*: and, that he may not seem hereby to require only a subordinate and inferior degree of Worship, he teaches in another Place, that *all Men should worship the Son as they worship*

20 *Plain Notions of*

the Father; he that worshipping not the Son, worshipping not the Father that sent him. It is therefore worthy of Enquiry, how some modern Hereticks can pretend to worship and pray to our Lord as the Gospel requires; and yet not confess him to be *One with his Father, and over all God blessed for ever.* They who pray to, and worship one, whom they believe to be a created, subordinate and dependent Being, are most certainly guilty of Idolatry; and therefore to act consistently, they should either disown his Worship, or acknowledge his Divinity.

I have By this time, as I hope, made good the Doctrine of my Text from the single Behaviour of our Lord himself, without citing the many other Texts of Scripture which do abundantly prove it. It is plain from the whole, that he did not so much declare his Divinity in express Words, as set it forth in his Actions; but that he withal, sufficiently shew'd his Intention that we should believe it. His Commands, his Promises, and above all, the Worship which he requires of his Disciples, are sufficient Proofs that he deserv'd the Name of *Emmanuel*, and was, to the Truth of the Letter, *God with us.* But if he appear'd so truly *God with us* in the Humiliation of his first Coming, how much more evidently will he appear so in the Glory and Triumph of his second: if whilst he was despis'd *and rejected of Men*, he assum'd so much of his Divinity,
how

our Lord's Divinity. 21

how much more of it, to the Comfort of his Friends, and the Confusion of his Enemies, will he display, when he returns in the Splendor of *King of Kings*, and *Lord of Lords*?

But in order farther to justify the Interpretation which I have given of our Lord's Behaviour, I would make a few short Observations. And in the first Place, I would consider the Character of *Jesus* and his Disciples. Though the Expressions of Scripture which prove his Divinity were obscure, which indeed they are not, yet the Considerations of his great Compassion and Condescension should determine us to the more favourable Meaning. Can we suppose, that he, who was *the Way*, *the Truth* and *the Life*, should by doubtful Expressions lead us into Mistakes about the the Object of our Worship: could the meek and humble *Jesus*, who seem'd not to *seek his own Glory*, give any Occasion to rival unjustly the Glory of his Father? Could he who in all other things took not upon him so much as Man, yet in this Point take upon him more; and at least in doubtful Terms, arrogate the Name and Worship of the Deity? If he had not been willing to be thought *God with us*, he would consistently with that have told them; " You must believe in God, " but not in me; you will baptize and do " Miracles, but do neither of these in my " Name; I am not your Lord but your Fellow Servant, and therefore give not me that
" Worship

22 *Plain Notions of*

“Worship which belongs only to the Father; though I have by Impropriety of Speech assum’d the Name and Attributes of the Godhead, yet those Expressions mean something very different; and be assur’d, that in all Ages the truest Interpreters of my Will, prove the most violent Opposers to my divine Character”. Thus would have spoke the Teacher of Truth, and the Example of all Humility, if he had disapprov’d of that Doctrine, which was early receiv’d by his first Disciples, and hath been the Test and Mark of his true Followers ever since.

But as the Humility of our Lord, which was very evident upon all other Occasions, made him incapable of exceeding in any Expressions relating to himself, so the Disposition of his Disciples doth the same. They were not bred up in Heathen Countries, where Polytheism was fashionable, and where divine Honours were commonly paid to dead Mortals; but being all of them *Jews*, belong’d to a Nation strict in the Worship of one God, and at that time very jealous of any Tendency to Idolatry; notwithstanding we do not find that they were ever offended at their Master, or divided among themselves about this Doctrine; tho’ they were zealous for the Worship of one God, yet they thought the Worship of the Son consistent with it, and they seem’d to understand the Unity Persons in the Godhead so well, as to believe that
he

our Lord's Divinity. 23

he who worshipp'd the Son, worshipp'd the Father also.

Let us farther consider the Belief of the primitive Church, which ought to be of some Weight with every good Christian. Nothing is so clear from History, as that our Saviour's Divinity, was receiv'd as a necessary Article of Faith in the first and purest Ages. I shall not here trouble you with any Citations to prove this; but think it abundantly evident, from their Strictness with which they observ'd the Form of Baptism, their triple Immersion being an Argument of their Belief of the Trinity. This Fact likewise appears from the Errors of the first Hereticks; who generally agreed in affirming, that our Lord was crucified only in appearance: the Faith of the Church in this Point was then so unmov'd, that the greater part of the false Christians run into the excess of this Doctrine; and chose rather to deny the Truth of our Saviour's Incarnation, than to question that of his Divinity. * *Pliny* in his Letter to *Trajan*, giving an Account of the Christian Assemblies, observes, that one part of their Religion was to *to sing Hymns to Christ as God*. And the Scoffs of *Lucian*, together with the Objections of *Porphyry* and *Celsus*, who were two implacable Enemies of our Faith, are sufficient Testimonies of this Fact, that our Lord

* Lib. 10. Ep. 97.

24 *Plain Notions of*

was by his Followers at that time acknowledged to be God.

The early Reception of this Doctrine, and the Continuance of it ever since, should determine the Sense of Scripture to the Orthodox side, though the Expressions of it upon this Head were, as they certainly are not, doubtful and ambiguous. For is it credible, that *Jesus Christ* should promise to be with his Followers to the end of the World, and yet suffer them to be ever since mistaken about himself? that he should assure them of a Spirit to lead them into all Truth, and yet permit them to be led into Errors of the most dangerous Consequence? Can it be suppos'd, that those glorious Martyrs and Confessors should wilfully innovate or pervert that Faith for which they chose to suffer? Must not the Christian Doctrine, like all other Institutions, have been most pure at its Fountain Head? Is our Belief to be modell'd and explain'd afresh, after a Prescription of seventeen hundred Years? Or lastly, Is the great Apostasy of the latter Times, which is so frequently foretold by the Scriptures, describ'd by a too great Respect to the Author and Finisher of our Faith; or is it not rather explain'd by *denying the Lord that bought them*?

But let us farther consider the Terms of this Doctrine; and try from thence, whether it could be, as most Errors are, agreeable to human Dispositions and Understandings. This
great

our Lord's Divinity. 25

great Mystery of Godliness, by which we believe *God manifested in the Flesh*, is of too sublime a Nature to be the Matter of human Invention. When Men form to themselves Opinions opposite to Truth, they are generally led by some human Views of Pride or Ease, or some temporal Profit; but none of these Motives could have any part in the Belief of our Lord's Divinity. If this Article of our Faith had been the Product of human Thought, it would have appear'd to be so, in being more proportion'd to our Capacities. The Pride of Man is more dispos'd to debase the Mysteries of Religion than to exalt them, and more readily embraces that which it can with ease comprehend, and with reputation explain. If the Disciples of our Lord therefore had follow'd their own Notions and Humours, in discoursing about him, they would have rather represented him a mere Creature, which would have made more Converts, and have been less expos'd to the Objections of Hereticks, and the Scoffs of Unbelievers. The Reception of it could not arise from any other Views of temporal Advantage, since it is nothing a-kin to those Opinions which have been imputed to Priest-craft; nor have been promoted by secular Policy; for on the contrary, it oblig'd the Professors of it to greater Strictness of Life, and expos'd them the more to Persecution. Nor, lastly, hath this Notion arisen, which is a modern and false Suggestion,

D

from

26 *Plain Notions of*

from any fashionable Sett of Opinions prevailing at the Rise of Christianity. Some modern Hereticks, in order to expose the Doctrine of the Trinity, have referr'd the Original of it to some *Platonick* Philosophers, who grafted their own Sentiments upon the Gospel: Whereas it is certain, that the first Christians had an utter Contempt, not to say Detestation of *Platonism*, which they look'd upon as the Bulwark of Pagan Superstition. The great Revivers of that Sect in the third Century, were the most avow'd Enemies and Persecutors of our Holy Faith; and the Opinions of it relating to the Deity, are so far from agreeing with the orthodox Belief of the Trinity, that they evidently express the *Arian* Heresy; and beyond all doubt, gave advantage to that, and other dangerous Opinions.

I would observe one thing more of this Doctrine; and that is, the Consistency of it with the low and afflicted Condition of our Lord on Earth. It is no Objection against the Truth I have been hitherto explaining, that our Saviour *was in all things like to us, Sin only excepted*. His Grievs and Sufferings, together with the low Expressions he useth concerning himself, are the Consequences of his Manifestation, and are not to be accounted Objections against his Divinity, but Proofs of his Humanity. As he was both God and Man, he sometimes, as he saw occasion, acted in
one

our Lord's Divinity. 27

one Character, and sometimes in the other: He partook of the common Condition and Circumstances of human Nature, and yet gave evident Demonstrations of his being *God, manifested in the Flesh*. He, as a common Man, sensible of Passions and Affections, wept for *Lazarus*; as God, he rais'd him from the Dead; in the one Capacity he laid down his own Life, in the other he had Power to take it again; he suffer'd the Pain of Hunger and Thirst, and yet could, when he pleas'd, feed five thousand with a Miracle; he receiv'd the Holy Spirit as for himself, and yet could upon occasion, bestow it upon others: and therefore in one Sense it was true, that his *Father* was *greater than he*, and in another that he and his *Father were one*. These seemingly differently Expressions are not Contradictions in Scripture, but Arguments of both Natures in our blessed Lord.

I conclude from the whole, that our Lord could not have given greater Proofs of his Divinity, consistently with his Manifestation in the Flesh; and that he fulfill'd the Prediction of the Text, in declaring himself, and being so acknowledg'd by all his true Disciples, *God with us*. If any out of a carnal Pride, are for rejecting this mysterious Union from the Difficulty of conceiving it, let them account for the Union of two so different Substances as Soul and Body in one Person; let them shew the Possibility of a created God,

28 *Plain Notions of*

of a dependent and inferior Redeemer. But it is certain, that these despisers of Mysteries are not without as great Mysteries of their own; and it is not more difficult to believe, that our Redeemer was both God and Man, than that one who was not so, should save and redeem Mankind. The true Christian should so far submit his Reason to Faith, as to believe some things, which he, as yet knows only in part; he should not carry his Curiosity into such things, as neither his Faculties enable him, nor his Necessities require him, to comprehend: he should rather entertain his Mind with the Blessings, than with the Manner and Circumstances of the Incarnation; and instead of questioning his Saviour's Dignity, admire his Condescension.

I would now in the last place, consider the practical Tendency of this Doctrine to promote Christian Dispositions; and do presume, that the Usefulness of believing it will be still a farther Argument of its Truth, and vindicate our excellent Church, in making it a necessary Article of Communion.

i. Then, The Belief of *God manifested in the Flesh*, may inspire a Christian with a greater measure of Hope and Comfort.

The Apostle *St. Paul* observes, that there is *great Joy and Comfort in believing*; but whatever there is of this kind, it is wholly owing to this Doctrine which I have been hitherto

our Lord's Divinity. 29

hitherto explaining. The divine Character of our great Lord, is a most effectual Assurance of the Means of Salvation; without this we should with reason distrust the Greatness or the Uncertainty of the Evangelical Promises; *our Preaching would be vain, and your Faith would be also vain.* But the true Belief of our Lord's Divinity, is the most comfortable Article of the Christian Religion, and is that *Anchor of the Soul sure and stedfast.* For he who truly believes in the great Author and Finisher of his Faith, can he think that to be little which he hath purchas'd, or that to be uncertain which he hath promis'd? How little reason will he have to doubt the Acceptance of his Prayers, when they appear recommended by a divine Intercessor? How little will he be afraid of the Terrors of Men, when that Lord, whose Name he professes, and for whose Truth he suffers, is *King of Kings, and Lord of Lords:* how easily will he promise himself Conquest over his spiritual Enemies, when from his Belief in Christ he is assur'd, that *greater* is he who *is in us*, than he who *is in the World*? Lastly, With how full an Assurance of Hope may he look forward to the Joys of the next Life, when they, as great as they are, do not exceed the infinite Merits of a divine Redeemer, in which he is a Sharer? *Who is he, saith the Apostle, that overcometh the World, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?*

But

30 *Plain Notions of*

But on the other side, the contrary Opinion, which denies our Lord's Divinity, is as distant from Comfort, Joy, and Peace, as it is from the Truth of the Gospel: The Confidence of such half Believers is either criminal or precarious; it is either plac'd in their own weak Performances, or in the Merits of a Creature such as themselves.

2. The Belief of God manifested in the Flesh, gives a greater Authority to the Gospel. They who truly believe in our Lord, will with all Readiness submit to the Terms of his Covenant; but if they mistake or undervalue the Dignity of the Teacher, they will have the less regard to his Instructions. If an Angel had come from Heaven with proper Credentials to propose new Terms of Obedience, what Folly and Arrogance would it be for Mortals to disobey? But how much stronger Arguments have we for that Obedience which we owe to the Son of God? He, not as an Ambassador, but as a Sovereign, proclaims Peace and Pardon to his rebellious Subjects, and doth himself set forth those Terms upon which he will bestow them. With what Reverence then should we receive, with what Diligence should we search, and with what Faithfulness should we follow those Words of eternal Life, which he left behind him? As often as we hear the Gospel, we should imagine that we hear divine Wisdom speaking with a due Mixture of Authority
and

our Lord's Divinity. 31

and Condescension, and should for our Parts take care that so divine a Teacher may not seem to have taught in vain. The great Dignity of our Lord *Jesus*, who vouchsaf'd to teach us, requires the greater Reverence to his Instructions, and doth likewise make it our greater Guilt if we disobey them. *See, saith the Apostle, that you despise not him that speaketh; for if they escaped not who despised him who spoke on Earth, how much less we who reject him that speaketh from Heaven.*

3. The Belief of God manifested in the Flesh shews the great Mercy and Price of the Redemption. He who is most sincere and orthodox in his Faith, will be most apt to be sensible of the great Mercy and Condescension of our Lord's Manifestation; but the Hereticks must be, as they indeed generally are, very insensible of this great Salvation; their Gratitude will rise in proportion to their Belief, and if they think contemptuously of the Redeemer, they will scarce prize the Redemption; but they who from the Dignity of Christ, are persuaded how much it cost to redeem their Souls, can want no Motives to Love and Thankfulness. How great must a true Believer esteem the Condescension of the Son of God, by which he for our sakes came from Heaven to Earth, and *was made in all things like unto us, Sin only excepted?* How merciful was this Work of Redemption in the Design,

Design, how wise in the Execution, how consistent both with Justice and Goodness, that we should neither be corrupted by Impunity, nor terrify'd by unavoidable Judgment; that our Saviour should so put away Sin by the Sacrifice of himself, that the Sinner should conceive a Horrour for his Guilt, and yet have Hope and Comfort in his Repentance? This great Mystery is both in the saving Effects of it, and the Price which it cost, the greatest Instance of divine Goodness which Mankind could receive. The other Mercies of Providence, by which we live, move, and have our Being, are neither so expensive to God the Giver, nor so beneficial to us, as the Work of the Redemption. The Almighty can readily open his Hand, and fill all things living with Plenteousness; he can replenish, support, and protect them with the same speedy *Fiat* with which he created them: But the Incarnation of the Son of God doth, both in the Effect and the Expence of it, far exceed all other Blessings. This shews the Love of God to the greatest Advantage, but is utterly lost upon those who account the *Blood of the Covenant a common thing*.

The Meditations upon the Greatness of divine Love to Mankind should be the pious Employment of this Season; our Minds should be at this time awaken'd to that Mystery of Godliness, by which God was manifested in the Flesh. Our Joy for that Salvation,

our Lord's Divinity. 33

tion, which we now commemorate, should be great as the Occasion, but yet should be pure and innocent as our Profession. We should carefully and conscientiously avoid those fashionable Excesses of the Season, and employ our selves as our Church directs, and our spiritual Necessities require, in pious Exercises and devout Meditations. We should not at the Feast of our Saviour's Nativity give in to those sinful Liberties which he was born to abolish and to atone for, and whilst we are commemorating the Blessing of the Redemption, do it in so improper a manner, as to forfeit our own share in it.

But the Conclusion I would make from this whole Discourse, is to entreat you in that Saviour's Name, for whom I have been speaking, to be very zealous for his Dignity and divine Character, in Opposition to the heretical Notions now growing among us. The Circumstances of the Time make it necessary to advise you to contend earnestly for so fundamental an Article of that Faith which was once delivered to the Saints. This is a Matter of that Importance to Religion, that all Coldness in it is criminal, and all Indifference Defection. Think not therefore, that when you contend for the Divinity of our blessed Lord, you strive for any thing less than for your baptismal Profession, for the Test of Christianity, and for the Pledge and Earnest of your Salvation; think not that if

E

the

34 *Plain Notions of*

the contrary Opinion should prevail, it would prove only a Matter of mere Speculation, but will undoubtedly add to our national Sins, and even be a means of removing the *Candlestick of the Gospel out of its Place*. How extensive this Error, or how ^{near} new the Punishment of it may be to us, God, who knows the Hearts and governs the Affairs of Men, can only tell; but this we may affirm, that if ever the Opposition to our Lord's Divinity be publickly avow'd, we have reason from the Experience of other Countries to fear that we have already fill'd up the Measure of our Iniquities.

It is worthy of Observation, that when Men have once step'd aside from this Doctrine but never so little, they have seldom stop'd there, but have gone from one length of doubting to another, till they have wander'd from their whole Faith. And this therefore may give an Account why *Mahometism* found so easy Progress in those Parts of the Eastern Countries, where *Arianism* most prevail'd; for after those unhappy Hereticks had once parted with the true and orthodox Belief of our Lord, they had nothing left to rest upon; and from doubting whether he was *God manifested in the Flesh*, they soon disown'd him from being their Saviour and Mediator. We have the more reason to be zealous in this Point, because as a Defection from the Faith in the latter Times is frequently foretold in the

the

our Lord's Divinity. 35

the Gospel, so that Defection is describ'd by no one Character so much as the *Denial of the Lord who bought them*: And who can so truly be said to do this, as they who deny that Character, and those Merits by which he did so?

Let us then, as being assur'd of our Lord's first coming, and firmly expecting his second, adhere to and reverence his adorable Divinity; let us, according to our several Capacities, oppose the Growth of those Novel Opinions, which are so opposite to Truth, so affronting to our great Master, and so dangerous to the Souls of Men; let us for our Parts be active in promoting his Honour on Earth, as we are assur'd he is managing our Interest above; let us *thus confess our Saviour before Men*, that he may *confess us before his Father in Heaven*.

F I N I S.



